

# **NUISANCE ANIMAL CONTROL PLAN**




## **ST. CATHERINE CREEK & CAT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**


## Nuisance Animal Control Plan for St. Catherine Creek & Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge

Prepared by:  Date: 1/29/09  
Park Ranger, St. Catherine Creek NWR Complex

Reviewed by:  Date: 1/29/09  
Project Leader, St. Catherine Creek NWR Complex

Reviewed by:  Date: 3/19/09  
Division of Habitat and Wildlife Management

Reviewed by:  Date: 3/17/09  
Deputy Area 2 Refuge Supervisor

Approved by:  Date: 3/26/2009  
Regional Chief

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# **Nuisance Animal Control Plan St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuges**

## **Introduction:**

This Control Plan outlines methods for control two invasive species on St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge: feral hogs and beaver. These two species cause substantial damage to habitat and infrastructure, including damage to waterfowl impoundment levees, trees, shrubs, and vegetation, mast crop consumption, road and trail destruction, flooding and killing, and gnawed, girdled, and cut trees.

## **I. Feral Hog**

### **A. Description**

For the purposes of this control plan, the term feral hog shall be used to refer to both domestic pigs which are now free living and not under the ownership of humans and the introduced European wild boar. Feral hogs were present on the area now known as St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge prior to its acquisition by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Wild hogs had been introduced to the area by "hog hunters" (even though illegal) in an effort to establish a huntable population. Prior to refuge establishment, the hog population was kept somewhat in check by the local hog hunters. However, their reason for hog hunts was to provide a hunting sport for local hog hunters, not to control feral hog numbers. Since the refuge was established refuge staff have noted an increase in feral hog numbers and the severity of the resource damage.

These introduced hogs have reproduced, spread, and are now found throughout the refuge and on adjoining landowners in southwest Mississippi and southeast Louisiana. Feral hogs are prolific, with reproductive rates four times that of native ungulate species (Taylor et al, 1998).

**B. Assistance**

Assistance has been provided to this station by a number of other offices and individuals on proper control techniques. A brief summary of contacts made concerning feral hog control efforts is given below.

1. Consultation with personnel of Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge: advice on control techniques and trap design.
2. Internet sites describing trapping techniques and trap designs.
3. Consultation with local hog trappers: advice on control techniques and trap designs.
4. Consultation with adjoining landowners: advice on control techniques and trap designs that they are currently using.
5. Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks (Brookhaven District 5 Office and Jackson Office): advice on hog trap design, baiting recommendations, techniques and regulations governing the taking of feral hogs.

**C. Methods Recommended and Alternatives**

**1. Control Methods**

The goal of control efforts shall be the eradication of feral hogs on St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuges. A measure of the control success will be based on the amount of hog sign and hog sightings following initiation of the control efforts. A detailed record of number and location of animals taken will be kept and reported to the refuge manager on a weekly basis.

Methods of control proposed for use on St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge are those which have been proven effective in other areas under a variety of circumstances and which have been proven to be species specific. These methods include opportunistic shooting by refuge personnel, live trapping conducted by refuge staff and volunteers, contract nuisance animal trappers, and the use of public control through the incidental take of feral hogs during scheduled hunts for game species, with weapons legal for those hunts.

Refuge personnel will conduct incidental shootings during their normal work activities or as directed by the refuge project leader and dispatched hogs will

be disposed of by leaving the carcasses in the forest. This will allow predators, scavengers, and other opportunistic carnivores to use the remains.

Incidental control will be conducted by authorized refuge personnel in accordance with 50 CFR 31.14, 50 CFR 30.11, and 7 RM 14.9.

The policy of the Service is to engage in the control of wildlife within the National Wildlife Refuge System to assure balanced wildlife and fish populations consistent with the optimum management of refuge habitat. The objective of animal control management is to prevent substantial damage to refuge resources.

Title 50 CFR governs authorization of control practices, Part 31, Section 14:

(a) Animal species which are surplus or detrimental to the management program of a wildlife area may be taken in accordance with Federal and State laws and regulations by Federal or State personnel or by permit issued to private individuals.

(b) Animal species which are damaging or destroying Federal property within a wildlife refuge area may be taken or destroyed by Federal personnel.

Title 50 CFR, Part 30, Section 11 (a) states:

Feral animals, including horses, burros, cattle, swine, sheep, goats, reindeer, dogs, and cats, without ownership that have reverted to the wild from a domestic state may be taken by authorized Federal or State personnel or by private persons operating under a permit in accordance with applicable provisions of Federal or State law or regulation.

7 RM 14.9 (vertebrate control) states:

The emphasis in the control of vertebrate populations will be based, whenever possible, upon an IPM approach.

A. Alternatives. In descending order of preference, the vertebrate control alternatives include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Environmental manipulation, i.e., biological control, habitat management techniques not involving chemicals lethal or injurious to vertebrates;
2. Live trapping and transfer;
3. Public harvest of target wildlife through public hunting, fishing, and trapping
4. Repellants-non lethal
5. Physical or mechanical protection (barriers, fences, etc.)
6. Lethal reduction by means other than public harvest or poison;
7. Lethal reduction through the use of chemicals

Live trapping shall be conducted using specially designed hog traps baited with whole corn or other suitable bait. Traps are designed to be species

specific and allow non-target animals to escape from the trap. Traps are designed with open tops to allow bears to climb out if they happen to get in the trap. Trapping will be conducted in the open hunting areas during spring and summer when the refuge visitation is low, and refuge hunts are not scheduled. Traps will not be baited immediately before a refuge hunt, or during a refuge hunt, to prevent hunters from putting themselves at risk of hunting over bait.

Trapping will be conducted in the Cloverdale Unit year round except immediately before and during the Cottonmouth Unit archery hunt, where no trapping will be conducted. Refuge staff will scout for repeated instances of hog activity. These areas should be pre-baited prior to the setting of live traps and once set the trap doors should be wired open until hogs are accustomed to entering the trap. Such steps should result in multiple catches per trap, increasing the effectiveness of trapping efforts. Feral hogs caught in traps shall be humanely dispatched and disposed of as identified above.

## **2.Alternatives**

Several alternatives to the proposed action were considered during development of the control/trapping plan for this station. Those considered include an open public feral hog control hunt, and hog hunting sportsmen using hog dogs to chase and catch hogs.

The use of an open public feral hog controlled hunt was discarded because it is believed a public hunt will increase the likelihood that individuals will release hogs on the refuge to improve the hunts.

One of the objectives of St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge is to provide protection of fish and wildlife. A proposal of no action would result in an increase in the number of feral hogs presently on the refuge. This would result in continued and increased damage to habitats and mast crop on the refuge. Damage would continue to occur to roads and ATV/walking trails resulting in increased maintenance efforts at great expense to the government. Rooting by hogs would also introduce dangers to equipment and refuge personnel who are involved in the maintenance of these roads, trails and levees. Rooting and wallowing diminishes habitat and food quality by removing ground litter and vegetation. Disturbance of ground litter and vegetation affects the habitat quality for many species of birds, amphibians, and reptiles, small mammals, and insects.

### **C. Justification of Pest Control**

One of the objectives of this station is to provide habitat and protection of migratory birds, fish and wildlife. The bottomland hardwood forests of the refuge provide the habitat base needed to achieve this objective. Feral hogs are non-native animal pests found throughout the refuge and on adjoining properties. Feral hogs have an adverse effect on habitat and productivity of most native wildlife. Since they are omnivores, feral hogs use virtually every component of the habitat, resulting in direct competition with native wildlife, reductions in carrying capacities, and adverse impacts to reproduction and recruitment. In addition, feral hogs serve as a source for many diseases that affect wildlife as well as domestic livestock. Some other problems feral hogs cause include soil erosion, leaching of minerals and nutrients, habitat destruction, native plant species destruction, exotic plant species invasion and maintenance, and changes in vegetative succession rates.

Feral hogs have already caused damage to a number of roads and trails from rooting. The presence of feral hogs provides no benefits to the refuge and with an increase in the present population the damage will only increase if feral hog numbers are not reduced.

## **II. Beaver**

### **A. Control Methods Recommended**

#### **1. Control Methods**

Methods of control proposed for use on St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge are those which have been proven effective in other areas and under a variety of circumstances and which have been proven to be species specific. These methods include opportunistic shooting by refuge personnel and live trapping in areas that have heavy beaver activity that could pose a threat to forest health and survival. Beavers will be shot on sight by refuge personnel and disposed of by leaving carcasses in the forest. This will allow predators, scavengers, and other opportunistic carnivores to use the remains. The opportunistic shooting by refuge personnel will be conducted during normal work duties or as directed by the refuge project leader and surveillance in the areas where the beavers are noted. Refuge personnel will remove dams and make sure water is not being held on forested areas.



## **B. Justification of Pest Control**

One of the objectives of St. Catherine Creek and Cat Island NWR is to provide habitat and protection of migratory birds, fish and wildlife. Beavers have important ecological value, but populations need to be managed to regulate damage to the forest. The bottomland hardwood forest habitat on the refuge provides the habitat base needed to meet the mission of providing habitat for migratory birds. Beavers are known for constructing dams in brakes/sloughs holding water in these low areas causing timber to die. Before the refuge was established beaver flooding was a major problem on the refuge. Once refuge was established and refuge staff began removing beaver dams the flooding was somewhat reduced. With the decline in the market value of beaver pelts, the species began increasing in many places in Mississippi and Louisiana (Lowery 1974). Beaver populations in the 1930's, started multiplying, and there were many complaints of damage to crops and to valuable forest trees (Lowery 1974). The price of beaver pelts is still so low that local trappers have no interest in trapping them.

### **Literature Cited**

Lowery, H. George Jr. 1974. The Mammals of Louisiana and Its Adjacent Waters. pp. 217-224.

Taylor, R. B., Hellgren, E.C., Gabor, T.M. and Ilse, L.M. 1998. Reproduction of feral pigs in southern Texas. *Journal of Mammalogy*, 79(4):1325-1331.

50 CFR 31.14. Official animal control operations. pp. 178

50 CFR 30.11. Control of feral animals. pp. 177

7 RM 14.9. Vertebrate control.

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT**

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the proposed Nuisance Animal Control Plan for St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Adams and Wilkinson Counties, Mississippi:





Check One:

- X   is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 and 516 DM 6, Appendix 1, Section 1.4 A (4). No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.
- is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- is found to have significant effects and, therefore, further consideration of this action will require a notice of intent to be published in the Federal Register announcing the decision to prepare an EIS.
- is not approved because of unacceptable environmental damage, or violation of Fish and Wildlife Service mandates, policy, regulations, or procedures.
- is an emergency action within the context of 40 CFR 1 506.1 1. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other Supporting Documents:

Finding of No Significant Impact  
Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation

Signature Approval:

 (1) Originator	<u>1-28-2009</u> Date	 (2) Regional Environmental Coordinator	<u>03/25/2009</u> Date
 (3) Regional Chief, NWRS, Southeast Region	<u>3/26/2009</u> Date	 (4) Regional Director, Southeast Region	<u>3/26/09</u> Date

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge Nuisance Animal Control Plan**

#### **Introduction**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to introduce a Nuisance Animal Control Plan on St. Catherine Creek NWR. Trapping activities will be permitted, but limited to those areas specified in the animal control plan. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to trapping at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for other reasons. Alternatives considered included: no action – current management; and the proposed action – nuisance animal control plan for St. Catherine Creek NWR and reduction by contract trappers.

#### **Alternatives**

The Service has analyzed the following alternatives to the proposal in an Environmental Assessment (copy attached):

##### **No Action Alternative: Current Management**

Under this alternative, animal control through trapping would not be allowed on the refuge. Beaver and feral hog populations would increase in numbers and have negative impacts to native plants and animals. There would be no change to current public use and wildlife management programs.

##### **Proposed Action: Nuisance Animal Control Plan for St. Catherine Creek NWR**

The proposed action would establish a trapping program for beavers and feral hogs administered by refuge staff. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to trapping at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for administrative reasons.

**Reduction by Contract Trappers:** Under this alternative trappers would be selected by the refuge personnel and contracted out to trap nuisance animals (beavers and feral hogs). It is likely that contract trappers will be most interested in participating in such a program only when nuisance animal numbers are high. Trappers may not maintain interest once population numbers become low and will not continue trapping until the nuisance animals have been eradicated from the refuge.

#### **Selection Rationale**

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternative because:

The preferred alternative would allow the refuge personnel to trap nuisance animal populations as needed.

The preferred alternative is compatible with general Service policies regarding the establishment of trapping on National Wildlife Refuges.

The preferred alternative is compatible with the purpose of which St. Catherine Creek NWR was established.

There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.

**Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects:**

- The refuge could better manage wildlife populations.
- This would allow the refuge personnel to trap nuisance animals and reduce the amount of habitat damage occurring.
- The Service will be perceived as a good steward of the land by continuing traditional uses of land in Mississippi

**Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal. These measures include:**

- Traps are designed with open tops to allow for non-target animals to escape.
- Trapping will be conducted when refuge visitation is low.
- Refuge staff will go out to scout areas that have repeated nuisance activity.

**The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and flood plains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because this area has historically had a high use of recreational hunting and commercial trapping with no detrimental long-term effect on wetlands.**

**The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Parties contacted include:**


- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Ecological Services, Lafayette, LA
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks

**Therefore, it is my determination that the proposal does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environment Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):**

- 1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (EA, page 17-26).**
- 2. The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, page 17).**
- 3. The project will not significantly effect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA, page 17-26).**

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, page 17-26).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, page 17-26).
6. The actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, pages 17-26).
7. There will be no cumulative significant impacts on the environment. Cumulative impacts have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past action, and in foreseeable future actions (EA, pages 22-26).
8. The actions will not significantly affect any site listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, pages 17-26).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form attached to EA).
10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 6-26).

**References:** Nuisance Animal Control Plan, St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge including, Environmental Action Statement, Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation. January 2009.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**REGION 4**  
**INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM**

**Originating Person:** Deisha Norwood

**Telephone Number:** 318-336-7119

**E-Mail:** deisha\_norwood@fws.gov

**Date:** January 26, 2009

**PROJECT NAME (Grant Title/Number):**

Nuisance Animal Control Plan  
Step-down plan for the CCP

**I. Service Program:**

☐ Ecological Services

☐ Federal Aid

☐ Clean Vessel Act

☐ Coastal Wetlands

☐ Endangered Species Section 6

☐ Partners for Fish and Wildlife

☐ Sport Fish Restoration

☐ Wildlife Restoration

☐ Fisheries

☒ Refuges/Wildlife

**II. State/Agency:** Mississippi / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**III. Station Name:** St Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge

**IV. Description of Proposed Action (attach additional pages as needed):**

St Catherine Creek NWR is proposing a Nuisance Animal Control Plan for feral pigs and beavers after the close of the regular hunting season. Allowing this animal control to occur would reduce the number of feral pigs and beavers on the refuge. Reducing the number of pigs on the refuge would help prevent significant damage to reforestation areas, waterways, trails, roads and foods used by target wildlife species. Control of beavers would reduce the amount of timber damage from beaver dams flooding areas of the refuge for long periods of time. If beavers numbers are not reduced the amount of timber damage will only increase. This Control Plan will be one method used to control feral pigs on the refuge.

**V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:****A. Complete the following table:**

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	STATUS
Least Tern	E
Louisiana Black Bear	T
Fat Pocketbook mussel	E
Pallid Sturgeon	E

STATUS: E=endangered, T=threatened, PE=proposed endangered, PT=proposed threatened, CH=critical habitat, PCH=proposed critical habitat, C=candidate species

**VI. Location (attach map):**

- A. Ecoregion Number and Name:** Lower Mississippi, 27
- B. County and State:** Adams and Wilkinson Counties / Mississippi
- C. Distance (miles) and direction to nearest town:** the northern most refuge boundary is ~2 miles south of Natchez, MS.
- D. Species/habitat occurrence:**

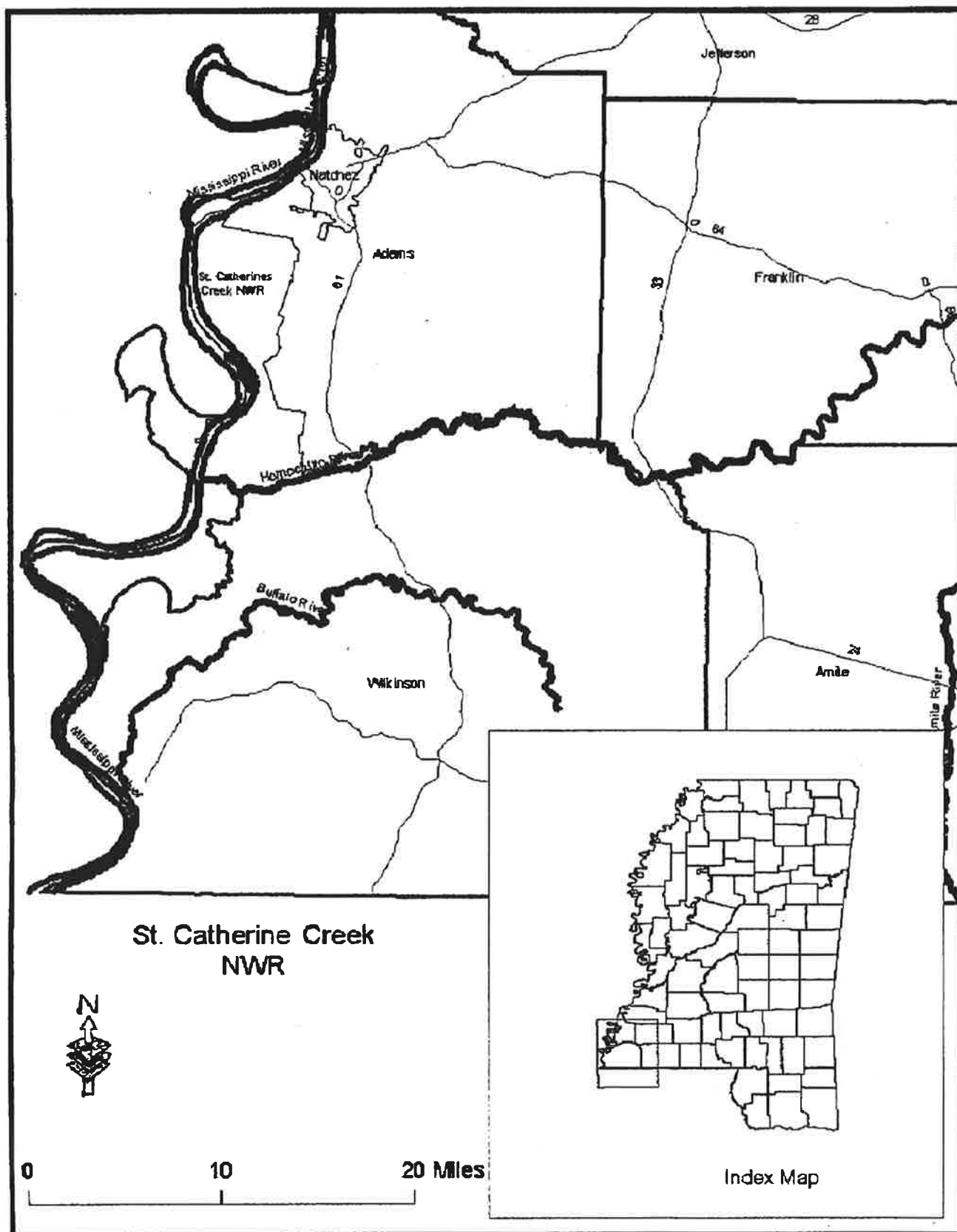
The Least Tern has been sighted on the refuge but has not been documented to breed within the refuge boundary.

There are two known occurrences of the Louisiana Black Bear crossing the Mississippi River into the State of Mississippi. In March 2005, a radio-collared female from Louisiana crossed the river and have five cubs in Wilkinson County, south of the refuge. The next month, another female crossed the river and was last tracked on Glascock Island, bordering the western edge of the refuge. A general increase of bear sightings in Southwest Mississippi over the last several years further indicates a potential for increased bear use of the refuge area.

The pallid sturgeon occurs within the Mississippi River which floods the refuge seasonally each year.

Shell recoveries have document the historical presence of the Fat Pocketbook mussel but the species has not been observed to currently occur on the refuge.

**Figure 1. Regional location**





**VII. Determination of Effects:**

- A. Explanation of effects of the action on species and critical habitats in item V. B (attach additional pages as needed):**

<b>SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT</b>	<b>IMPACTS TO SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT</b>
Least Tern	No Impact
Louisiana Black Bear	No Impact
Fat Pocketbook mussel	No Impact
Pallid Sturgeon	No Impact

- B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:**

<b>SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT</b>	<b>ACTIONS TO MITIGATE/MINIMIZE IMPACTS</b>
Least Tern	No trapping and/or shooting will occur within the preferred habitat of this species.
Louisiana Black Bear	<p>The feral hog trapping will be conducted after the regular hunting season. All traps will have open tops to allow bears to escape the traps. The use of dogs will not be allowed for the trapping of feral hogs.</p> <p>Refuge Staff will conduct incidental beaver shootings during routine visits to the dam areas. Most of the control conducted on the refuge will be free shooting and dam removal. If any trapping is done it will be done by Wildlife Services using leg hold traps. If trapping is needed it will not be conducted in areas where female bears and cubs are known to occur. This will reduce any chances of catching a cub in a leg hold trap.</p>
Fat Pocketbook mussel	No trapping and/or shooting will occur within the preferred habitat of this species.
Pallid Sturgeon	No trapping and/or shooting will occur within the preferred habitat of this species.

**VIII. Effect Determination and Response Requested:**

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	DETERMINATION <sup>1</sup>			RESPONSE REQUESTED
	NE	NA	A	
Least Tern		NA		
Louisiana Black Bear		NA		
Fat Pocketbook mussel		NA		
Pallid Sturgeon		NA		

**DETERMINATION/ RESPONSE REQUESTED:**

NE = no effect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action will not directly, indirectly, or cumulatively impact, either positively or negatively, any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested is optional but a "Concurrence" is recommended for a complete Administrative Record.

NA = not likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is not likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat or there may be beneficial effects to these resources. Response Requested is a "Concurrence".

AA = likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested for listed species is "Formal Consultation". Response requested for proposed and candidate species is "Conference".

**Enter the Species, the Determination, and the Response Requested.**

**No effect/no adverse modification.** For listed, proposed, or candidate species. This conclusion is reached if the proposed action and its interrelated and interdependent actions will not directly or indirectly affect listed species or destroy/adversely modify designated critical habitat. Response Requested action would be the optional written concurrence is encouraged to facilitate a complete administrative record.

**May Affect, but is not likely to adversely affect species/adversely modify critical habitat.** This conclusion is appropriate when effects to the species or critical habitat are expected to be beneficial, discountable, or insignificant. Beneficial effects are contemporaneous positive effects without any adverse effects to the species or habitat. Insignificant effects relate to the size of the impact (and should never reach the scale where take occurs), while discountable effects are those that are extremely unlikely to occur. Based on best judgment, a person would not: (1) be able to meaningfully measure, detect, or evaluate insignificant effects; or (2) expect discountable effects to occur. If the Ecological Services Office concurs in writing with the Project Leader's determination of "is not likely to adversely affect" listed species or critical habitat, the intra-Service section 7 consultation process is completed.

**May affect, and is likely to adversely affect species/adversely modify critical habitat.** This conclusion is reached if any adverse effect to listed species or critical habitat may occur as a direct or indirect result of the proposed Service action or its interrelated or interdependent actions, and the effect is not discountable or insignificant (see definition of "is not likely to adversely affect". In the event the overall effect of the proposed action is beneficial to the listed species or critical habitat, but may also cause some adverse effect on individuals of the listed species or segments of the critical habitat, then the determination should be "is likely to adversely affect." Such a determination requires formal section 7 consultation.

Example: A refuge proposes prescribed burning for a prairie remnant to improve the habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. The burn will substantially improve the habitat for the species and promote its recovery in subsequent years. However, individual Karner blue butterfly eggs and larvae will be killed during the burn. Even though the net effect of the burn will be highly beneficial to the listed species, the burn must be considered to have an adverse effect. A finding of "is likely to adversely affect" is necessary.

Is likely to jeopardize proposed species/adversely modify proposed critical habitat. For proposed species and proposed critical habitats, the Service is required to evaluate whether the proposed Service action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the proposed species or adversely modify an area proposed for designation as critical habitat. If this conclusion is reached, a section 7 conference is required. If this conclusion is reached, intra-Service conference is required.

Is likely to jeopardize candidate species. For candidate species, the Service is required to evaluate whether the proposed Service action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the candidate species. If this conclusion is reached, intra-Service section 7 conference is required.

Dusha Howard 1/29/09  
Signature (originating station) Date

Acting Deputy Project Leader  
Title

**IX. Reviewing Ecological Services Office Evaluation:**

- A. Concurrence X Nonconcurrence \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Formal consultation required \_\_\_\_\_  
C. Conference required \_\_\_\_\_  
D. Informal conference required \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Remarks (attach additional pages as needed):**

David Felder 1/29/09  
Signature Date

Biologist Jackson, MS ES OFFICE  
Title Office

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT**

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the proposed Nuisance Animal Control Trapping Plan for Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana:

Check One:

- X   is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 and 516 DM 6, Appendix 1, Section 1.4 A (4). No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.
- is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.
- is found to have significant effects and, therefore, further consideration of this action will require a notice of intent to be published in the Federal Register announcing the decision to prepare an EIS.
- is not approved because of unacceptable environmental damage, or violation of Fish and Wildlife Service mandates, policy, regulations, or procedures.
- is an emergency action within the context of 40 CFR 1 506.1 1. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other Supporting Documents:

Finding of No Significant Impact  
Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation

Signature Approval:

[Signature] 3/28/09      [Signature] 03/29/2009  
(1) Originator      Date      (2) Regional Environmental      Date  
Coordinator

[Signature] 3/29/2009      [Signature] 3/30/09  
(3) Regional Chief, NWRS,      Date      (4) Regional Director,      Date  
Southeast Region      Southeast Region

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge Nuisance Animal Control Plan**

#### **Introduction**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to introduce a Nuisance Animal Control Plan on Cat Island NWR. Trapping activities will be permitted, but limited to those areas specified in the animal control plan. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to trapping at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for other reasons. Alternatives considered included: no action – current management; and the proposed action – nuisance animal control plan for Cat Island NWR and reduction by contract trappers.

#### **Alternatives**

The Service has analyzed the following alternatives to the proposal in an Environmental Assessment (copy attached):

##### **No Action Alternative: Current Management**

Under this alternative, animal control through trapping would not be allowed on the refuge. Beaver and feral hog populations would increase in numbers and have negative impacts to native plants and animals. There would be no change to current public use and wildlife management programs.

##### **Proposed Action: Nuisance Animal Control Plan for Cat Island NWR**

The proposed action would establish a trapping program for beavers and feral hogs administered by refuge staff. All or parts of the refuge may be closed to trapping at any time if necessary for public safety, to provide wildlife sanctuary, or for administrative reasons.

**Reduction by Contract Trappers:** Under this alternative trappers would be selected by the refuge personnel and contracted out to trap nuisance animals (beavers and feral hogs). It is likely that contract trappers will be most interested in participating in such a program only when nuisance animal numbers are high. Trappers may not maintain interest once population numbers become low and will not continue trapping until the nuisance animals have been eradicated from the refuge.

#### **Selection Rationale**

The preferred alternative was selected over the other alternative because:

The preferred alternative would allow the refuge personnel to trap nuisance animal populations as needed.

The preferred alternative is compatible with general Service policies regarding the establishment of trapping on National Wildlife Refuges.

The preferred alternative is compatible with the purpose of which Cat Island NWR was established.

There are no conflicts with local, state, regional, or federal plans or policies.

**Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects:**

- The refuge could better manage wildlife populations.
- This would allow the refuge personnel to trap nuisance animals and reduce the amount of habitat damage occurring.
- The Service will be perceived as a good steward of the land by continuing traditional uses of land in Louisiana.

**Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal. These measures include:**

- Traps are designed with open tops to allow for non-target animals to escape.
- Trapping will be conducted when refuge visitation is low.
- Refuge staff will go out to scout areas that have repeated nuisance activity.

**The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and flood plains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because this area has historically had a high use of recreational hunting and commercial trapping with no detrimental long-term effect on wetlands.**

**The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Parties contacted include:**

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Ecological Services, Lafayette, LA
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Office of the Secretary, Wildlife Division

**Therefore, it is my determination that the proposal does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environment Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):**

- 1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment (EA, page 17-26).**
- 2. The actions will not have a significant effect on public health and safety (EA, page 17).**
- 3. The project will not significantly effect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historical or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA, page 17-26).**

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, page 17-26).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, page 17-26).
6. The actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, pages 17-26).
7. There will be no cumulative significant impacts on the environment. Cumulative impacts have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past action, and in foreseeable future actions (EA, pages 22-26).
8. The actions will not significantly affect any site listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, pages 17-26).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, or their habitats (Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation Form attached to EA).
10. The actions will not lead to a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pages 6-26).

**References:** Nuisance Animal Control Plan, Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge including, Environmental Action Statement, Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation. January 2009.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**REGION 4**  
**INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM**

**Originating Person:** Deisha Norwood

**Telephone Number:** 318-336-7119

**E-Mail:** Deisha\_norwood@fws.gov

**Date:** January 26, 2009

**PROJECT NAME (Grant Title/Number):** Nuisance Animal Control Plan.

**I. Service Program:**

☐ Ecological Services

☐ Federal Aid

☐ Clean Vessel Act

☐ Coastal Wetlands

☐ Endangered Species Section 6

☐ Partners for Fish and Wildlife

☐ Sport Fish Restoration

☐ Wildlife Restoration

☐ Fisheries

☒ Refuges/Wildlife

**II. State/Agency:** Louisiana / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**III. Station Name:** Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge

**IV. Description of Proposed Action (attach additional pages as needed):**

Cat Island NWR is proposing a Nuisance Animal Control Plan for feral pigs and beavers after the close of the regular hunting season. Allowing this animal control to occur would reduce the number of feral pigs and beavers on the refuge. Reducing the number of pigs on the refuge would help prevent significant damage to reforestation areas, waterways, trails, roads and foods used by target wildlife species. Control of beavers would reduce the amount of timber damage from beaver dams flooding areas of the refuge for long periods of time. If beavers numbers are not reduced the amount of timber damage will only increase. This Control Plan will be one method used to control feral pigs on the refuge.



**V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:**

**Complete the following table:**

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	STATUS
Louisiana Black Bear	T

STATUS: E=endangered, T=threatened, PE=proposed endangered, PT=proposed threatened, CH=critical habitat, PCH=proposed critical habitat, C=candidate species

**VI. Location:**

- A. Ecoregion Number and Name:** Lower Mississippi, 27
- B. County and State:** West Feliciana Parish / Louisiana
- C. Distance (miles) and direction to nearest town:** ~4 miles west of St. Francisville, LA.

**VII. Determination of Effects:**

- A. Explanation of effects of the action on species and critical habitats in item V.**
- B (attach additional pages as needed):**

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	IMPACTS TO SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT
Louisiana Black Bear	No Impact

**B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:**

<b>SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT</b>	<b>ACTIONS TO MITIGATE/MINIMIZE IMPACTS</b>
Louisiana Black Bear	<p>The feral hog trapping will be conducted after the regular hunting season. All traps will have open tops to allow bears to escape the traps. The use of dogs will not be allowed for the trapping of feral hogs.</p> <p>Refuge Staff will conduct incidental shootings during routine visits to the beaver dam areas. Most of the control conducted on the refuge will be free shooting and dam removal. If any trapping is done it will be done by Wildlife Services using leg hold traps. If trapping is needed it will not be conducted in areas where female bears and cubs are known to occur. This will reduce any chances of catching a cub in a leg hold trap.</p>

**VIII. Effect Determination and Response Requested:**

<b>SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT</b>	<b>DETERMINATION<sup>1</sup></b>			<b>RESPONSE<sup>1</sup> REQUESTED</b>
	<b>NE</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>A</b>	
Louisiana Black Bear		NA		

<sup>1</sup>DETERMINATION/ RESPONSE REQUESTED:

NE = no effect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action will not directly, indirectly, or cumulatively impact, either positively or negatively, any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested is optional but a "Concurrence" is recommended for a complete Administrative Record.

NA = not likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is not likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat or there may be beneficial effects to these resources. Response Requested is a "Concurrence".

AA = likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested for listed species is "Formal Consultation". Response requested for proposed and candidate species is "Conference".

**Enter the Species, the Determination, and the Response Requested.**

**No effect/no adverse modification.** For listed, proposed, or candidate species. This conclusion is reached if the proposed action and its interrelated and interdependent actions will not directly or indirectly affect listed species or destroy/adversely modify designated critical habitat. Response Requested action would be the optional written concurrence is encouraged to facilitate a complete administrative record.

**May Affect, but is not likely to adversely affect species/adversely modify critical habitat.** This conclusion is appropriate when effects to the species or critical habitat are expected to be beneficial, discountable, or insignificant. Beneficial effects are contemporaneous positive effects without any adverse effects to the species or habitat. Insignificant effects relate to the size of the impact (and should never reach the scale where take occurs), while discountable effects are those that are extremely unlikely to occur. Based on best judgment, a person would not: (1) be able to meaningfully measure, detect, or evaluate insignificant effects; or (2) expect discountable effects to occur. If the Ecological Services Office concurs in writing with the Project Leader's determination of "is not likely to adversely affect" listed species or critical habitat, the intra-Service section 7 consultation process is completed.

**May affect, and is likely to adversely affect species/adversely modify critical habitat.** This conclusion is reached if any adverse effect to listed species or critical habitat may occur as a direct or indirect result of the proposed Service action or its interrelated or interdependent actions, and the effect is not discountable or insignificant (see definition of "is not likely to adversely affect". In the event the overall effect of the proposed action is beneficial to the listed species or critical habitat, but may also cause some adverse effect on individuals of the listed species or segments of the critical habitat, then the determination should be "is likely to adversely affect." Such a determination requires formal section 7 consultation.

Example: A refuge proposes prescribed burning for a prairie remnant to improve the habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. The burn will substantially improve the habitat for the species and promote its recovery in subsequent years. However, individual Karner blue butterfly eggs and larvae will be killed during the burn. Even though the net effect of the burn will be highly beneficial to the listed species, the burn must be considered to have an adverse effect. A finding of "is likely to adversely affect" is necessary.

**Is likely to jeopardize proposed species/adversely modify proposed critical habitat.** For proposed species and proposed critical habitats, the Service is required to evaluate whether the proposed Service action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the proposed species or adversely modify an area proposed for designation as critical habitat. If this conclusion is reached, a section 7 conference is required. If this conclusion is reached, intra-Service conference is required.

**Is likely to jeopardize candidate species.** For candidate species, the Service is required to evaluate whether the proposed Service action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the candidate species. If this conclusion is reached, intra-Service section 7 conference is required.

Dushe Howard 1/28/09  
signature (originating station) date

ACTING DEPUTY PROJECT LEADER  
title

**IX. Reviewing Ecological Services Office Evaluation:**

A. Concurrence \_\_\_\_\_ Nonconcurrence \_\_\_\_\_

B. Formal consultation required \_\_\_\_\_

C. Conference required \_\_\_\_\_

D. Informal conference required \_\_\_\_\_

E. Remarks (attach additional pages as needed):

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature date

\_\_\_\_\_  
title office